DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 207 RC 024 052

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TITLE	Ensuring Rural Survival: Designing Professional Development That Builds Local Capacity.
PUB DATE	2003-03-00
NOTE	5p.; In: Rural Survival. Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (23rd, Salt Lake City, UT, March 20-22, 2003); see RC 024 044.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutes (Training Programs); Models; *Professional Development; Program Descriptions; Program Design; *Rural Schools; School Culture; School Districts; Special Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Behavior Management; *Capacity Building

ABSTRACT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 requires Individualized Education Program teams to consider positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) based on functional behavioral assessment for students with disabilities whose behavior impedes their learning or the learning of others. To meet federal mandates, educational personnel must be appropriately trained--a challenge for all schools, but especially for rural schools. A rural school district participated in a 4-day professional development institute in schoolwide PBIS using a design and evaluation model of professional development. Prior to the institute, university faculty worked with participants to identify specific needs, barriers, and resources related to PBIS implementation in their schools. Participants identified the dream for their school and their goal to be reached in 1 year's time, and then described their current situation. From this point, participants identified resources and supports, including community partners and other agencies; developed action steps to reach their goal; and then developed an agenda for that day of the institute. At the end of each day, each school team developed their agenda for the next day and shared at least one barrier and bridge they had identified. The institute concluded with each school identifying what they had accomplished, their immediate needs, and barriers to implementation. Data collected on the outcomes of training and implementation are used to provide a starting point for the next professional development activity. (TD)

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ENSURING RURAL SURVIVAL: DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT BUILDS LOCAL CAPACITY

Much discussion has focused on the apparent failure of the field of special education to "bridge the gap" between research and practice (Carnine, 1997; Vaughn, Klingner, & Hughes, 2000). The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE) (2002) found that special education places too little emphasis on prevention and intervention and does not always embrace and implement evidence-based practices. One evidence-based practice that has potential for addressing these issues is schoolwide positive behavior supports. In fact, the IDEA 97 already requires IEP teams to consider positive behavior interventions and supports based on functional behavioral assessment for students with disabilities whose behavior impedes their learning or the learning of others. Much research supports the use of positive behavior supports for all children schoolwide. In order to meet the requirements of current mandates, states, school districts, and institutes of higher education must ensure that preservice and inservice personnel are appropriately trained. This presents a challenging task for all states. As Mizell (2001) pointed out, "for too long the professional development practices of too many school systems and schools have led nowhere. Year after year, their staff development has amounted to little more than a disparate set of adult learning activities with few demonstrable results other than participants' mounting frustration" (pp.18-19).

Rural school districts, however, face additional, more daunting challenges when attempting to implement federally mandated changes. Rural school districts face stifling roadblocks when attempting to implement strategic changes such as inclusive education for students with disabilities and behavior problems. These roadblocks include a limited tax base for needed revenues, a need to deliver service over a wide geographic area, inadequate facilities, limited related services providers, high transportation costs, and a lack of access to effective professional development (Knapczyk, Rodes, & Brush, 1994; Helge, 1992; Howley, 1991). How then can rural school districts collaborate with institutes of higher education to design and develop high quality professional development? One suggestion is to conceptualize professional development from an evaluation perspective. Guskey (2002) emphasizes the importance of making evaluation central to the development of professional development to enhance its success. This evaluation must occur prior to the delivery of professional development, not just as the final stage as is often the case with traditional professional development. This paper proposes a conceptual model for the ongoing data-based design, development, delivery, and evaluation of professional development through a practical application of the model in a rural school district.

Conceptual Model

This design and evaluation (D&E) model (Mitchem & Wells, 2001) presents five steps (defining desired outcomes and impact, assessing context, developing content and process, evaluating impact, and evaluating outcomes) identified in the literature as critical in the process of gathering evaluation information regarding professional development (Guskey 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2002). Figure 1 depicts the D&E model and shows the steps necessary to effectively influence change in teacher practice, sustained use of that practice, and resulting improvement in student performance.

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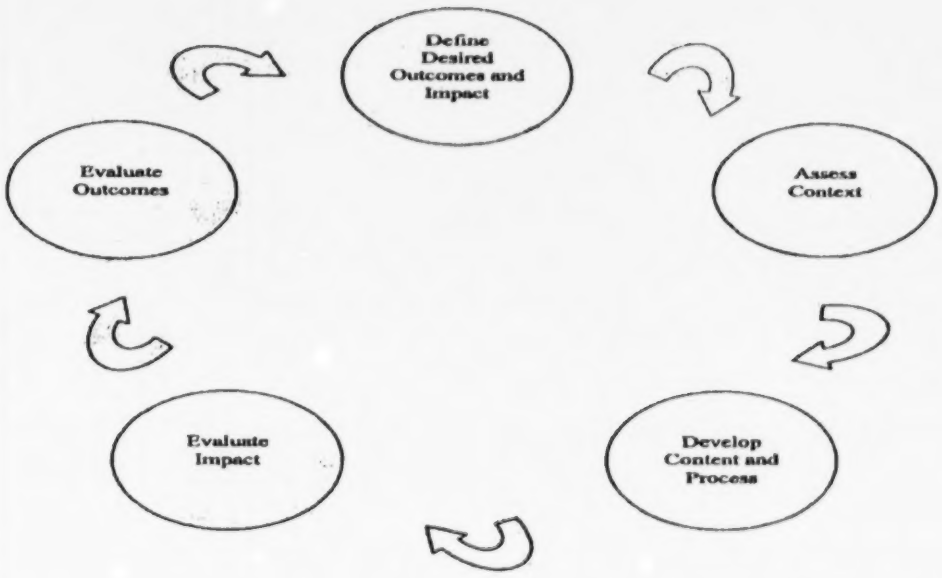

Mitchem & Wells, 2001

This paper describes one district's story of how it used the positive behavior supports process to identify specific barriers to PBIS and then to develop support strategies and resources to bridge these barriers and to facilitate systemwide change which was the desired impact and goal of the professional development. These steps included: (a) assessing the host environment or context in their school setting to identify specific needs and barriers to PBIS and identifying resources, supports, and strategies to bridge these barriers; (b) determining the content and process of the professional development to lead to implementation of PBIS and system-wide change; and (c) evaluating the impact and outcomes of training and PBIS implementation.

Assessing the Context and Identifying Barriers

Seven out of ten schools in the county had volunteered to participate in the professional development and had identified a site-based team that would attend training. Prior to beginning the professional development institute in School Wide Positive Behavior Supports, university faculty worked with the behavior leadership team in this county and examined school discipline plans, office referral data, and a faculty survey of perceived behavior problems and their locations in the county schools. In addition, each school completed a PBS Evaluation Instrument that asked school teams to identify the presence or absence of a number of elements identified as integral to a school with high implementation of SWPBS. The results of this assessment identified the following barriers to SWPBS for this district: time, financial concerns, a high turnover of teachers, a large number of unqualified and underqualified teachers, a relatively widespread conviction that PBIS was a "special education thing", and a widely held commitment to punishment for inappropriate behavior. On the other hand, the district also had access to the following resources and supports: a successful grant-writing special education director; support from the regional education support agency, and most importantly, a committed group of individuals who all had a common vision for the district.

Determining Content and Process

On the first day of training it was important to determine where each school was in the SWPBS process. A number of activities were designed to elicit that information,School-based teams began by completing the Effective Behavior Support (EBS) Survey (Lewis & Sugai, 1999) to identify what components were in place and what they

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wanted to work on during the institute. Participants also completed a school climate questionnaire (*Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools* or *Secondary Schools* as appropriate) (Hoy, Tartar, & Kottkamp, 2002). The challenge in any professional development is to make it meaningful for all participants. These instruments provided additional information on the host environment as well as serving to help participants identify potential barriers and supports prior to determining details of the content and process of the professional development. The next step, then, for each school team was to complete a School PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) (Pierpoint, O'Brien & Forrest. 1992). This is an organizational tool that facilitates strategic planning as well as team-building. Participants had to identify the dream for their school, their goal to be reached in one year's time, and then move back to the present to use the data collected previously to describe their current situation. From this point, participants identified resources and supports, including community partners and other agencies, developed action steps to reach their goal, and finally, developed an agenda for that day of the institute. Teams then worked on their agendas while the two university faculty and three district facilitators monitored and assisted as necessary. Each day ended with the school team developing their agenda for the next day (with measurable objectives) and a barriers and bridges activity in which teams identified at least one barrier they had identified and one bridge. These were shared with the other schools before leaving and then the next morning opened with a brainstorming session to allow participants to share any revelations or epiphanies they had experienced related to the barriers presented the previous evening.

Evaluating the impact

The 4 day institute concluded with an outbriefing in which each school identified what they had accomplished, what they saw as immediate needs, and barriers to implementation. Participants also evaluated the professional development activities. The following training products were collected and evaluated: (a) each school's identification of structural and environmental obstacles to positive behavior supports; (b) each school's identification and definition of expectations across each setting; (c) each school's lesson plans for teaching expectations; (d) a list of strategies to overcome faculty resistance; (e) each school's system for collecting, summarizing, and analyzing data; (f) plans and activities developed for opening day presentations to faculty, students, and parents; (g) a description of the incentive systems (the practicalities and logistics); and (h) plans for obtaining funds. In addition to these products developed during the training, new district wide discipline referral forms for elementary and secondary schools were designed to facilitate data collection and summary across schools and a collaborative grant was written by district and agency personnel from mental health and juvenile justice.

Evaluate outcomes (SWPBS)

The following data have been collected to evaluate the outcomes of SWPBS implementation across all seven schools: office referrals; targeted appropriate behaviors; attendance; in school suspension numbers; standardized test scores; student teacher, parent, and community satisfaction data; level of interagency collaboration, number of students referred for special education; number of students placed in special education, and number of students referred to alternative settings. The results of this evaluation are reported elsewhere (Mitchem, Richards, & Hill, under review). These data are then used to begin the cycle again. That is, data collected on the outcomes of training and implementation are used to describe the current climate and level of SWPBS implementation in the county. This provides the starting point for determining the next goals for the district and for developing the next set of professional development activities designed to meet those goals. The cycle begins again.

Summary and Conclusions

A continuing challenge in education is to improve the translation and use of research findings for educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders (Carnine, 1997; Gersten & Brengelmann, 1996). Research on this issue suggests that research findings seldom find their way into classroom practice and are implemented poorly even when they do (Cuban, 1990). Simply mandating a best practice is insufficient. Teachers must also receive training and ongoing support in the best practice to carry out the federal mandate (Guskey, 1995; Guskey & Sparks, 1996). Administrators' and teachers' concerns about inadequate preservice and inservice training have become even more pressing with *No Child Left Behind*. This paper described an approach to designing, delivering, and evaluating professional development to ensure that capacity is built within and across school buildings, partnerships are forged with other agencies and stakeholders, data-based decision-making is integrated into the process and that professional development is linked to student outcomes.

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2003 Conference Proceedings
Rural Survival
March 20-22, 2003; Salt Lake City, Utah

Author: Multiple - Editor: Ronda Menlove

Corporate Source: American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES)

Publication Date: March 2003

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